

Interview with
Ambassador Ido Aharoni
Consul General of Israel in New York

By Aliza Goldberg, *World Policy Journal*

Q: What has the Consulate General of Israel in New York office done in the aftermath of the confirmed death of the 3 kidnapped teenagers?

Throughout the tri-state area there has been a tremendous outpouring of support and solidarity for these three teenagers. There have been countless community vigils from Union Square to the Upper West Side of Manhattan, on Long Island, in New Jersey, Staten Island, Westchester, Brooklyn and more. People of all walks of life are coming out, making their voices heard, and standing with us against this heinous act of terror, and we can't thank this community enough for standing by our side during this time of mourning.

Q: What response does the Israeli government have regarding Mr. Abbas' stand on the kidnapping of the three teenagers? Does this show he is a partner for peace?

While we appreciate Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' statement condemning the kidnapping last week, it unfortunately ignores the larger issue facing the Palestinian government. Sadly, and contrary to the self-interest of the Palestinians themselves, President Abbas now represents a Palestinian government that includes Hamas, the very same terrorist organization responsible for the kidnapping and murder of our three boys. Since Hamas defends the kidnapping, and continues to call for the destruction of the State of Israel, it is virtually impossible for Israel to be able to negotiate with the Palestinian Authority seriously. President Abbas' decision to create a pact with Hamas with the intention of forming a unity government shows the Palestinian Authority's failure to excise itself of terrorist elements. This is the main reason we are not seeing peace today.

Q: What does the death of the 3 kidnapped teenagers mean for the future of IDF's actions? How would the situation have been different if the teenagers were found alive?

Measures taken by the IDF and Israeli police are meant to protect Israeli civilians from Palestinian terrorism. Unfortunately, this threat is nothing new, and did not begin with the kidnapping and murder of Eyal, Gilad, and Naftali. Sadly, it is the latest chapter of a century-old assault on Jewish national sovereignty in the Land of Israel. Israelis have full confidence in the capabilities and professionalism of

our police, military, and law enforcement agents. Israel will continue to keep its citizens safe from Hamas and other terrorist organizations who wish us harm.

Q: Do you believe the death of the three teenagers was an act of terror? Hamas made no demands and still has not claimed responsibility.

Yes, clearly this was a heinous act of terror committed by Hamas. We know that the two men who kidnapped and brutally murdered these young teenagers are in fact members of Hamas and come from families with long ties to Hamas. The mother of one of the murderers, Abu Aysha, said she would be proud of her son for committing this act of terror. Furthermore, Hamas' leader, Khaled Mashal, just recently called on Palestinians to attack Israeli civilians and commit such acts of kidnapping and murder. So while Hamas has not publicly claimed responsibility, it is clear that Hamas is committed to the destruction of Israel and to carrying out terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, and makes no secret of its agenda.

Q: Will the kidnapped boys change perceptions of Israel? Do you believe the international community choosing sides do so based on sympathy rather than politics? And if so, will more people support Israel?

The international community is united in opposition to Hamas. The United States, the European Union and Israel all designate Hamas as a terrorist organization. This most recent act of terrorism, which is all too commonplace for Hamas, should continue to galvanize international support against Hamas and any organization that supports them. Those who choose to stand in solidarity with us do so because no matter your political allegiance, there is no excuse for the murder of three young boys. This was a crime against humanity.

Q: The cycle of attack /counterattack has been in place between Israel and Gaza for several years, with an occasional truce. What do you think can help in stopping it?

The word "cycle" or as others have referred to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as "tit-for-tat" makes the wrongful assumption that both sides are equally responsible for the perpetuation of violence. The constant launching of rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel's southern communities, and Hamas' commitment to the destruction of the State of Israel and attacks on Israeli civilians are not the result of a specific Israeli action, but a mere response to our very existence as a Jewish State.

Q: Do you believe that there has been collective punishment in the occupied territories and Gaza?

This is a war against a terrorist organization, Hamas, that does not just target indiscriminately, but actively seek to kill and maim Israel's civilians, including women and children. During Israel's military response to the threat posed by Hamas in Gaza in 2009, Col. Richard Kemp CBE, a former Commander of British Forces in Afghanistan and one of the most highly decorated and respected officers in the British Army said, "the Israeli Defense Forces did more to safeguard the rights of civilians in the combat zones than any other army in the history of warfare." Israel does everything in its power to avoid damaging civilian infrastructure while still rooting out enclaves of terror activity.

Q: You have spent many years involved in Israel's political media relations and branding. What effect did the trending Twitter hashtag #BringBackOurBoys have on the international community's perception of Israel?

The #BringBackOurBoys campaign was an organic response to this terrible tragedy. To the best of my knowledge it wasn't a paid PR campaign but a natural way for Israelis and eventually, the world, to call for the safe return home of our three kidnapped boys. Teenagers and young people throughout the world, their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles all empathized with Gilad, Naftali and Eyal and their families. This online campaign brought people together of all ages from all four corners of the earth. It allowed all people to bring their voices to the international stage, and join together to stand against this atrocious crime against humankind.

Q: How has social media changed the conversation of Israeli politics?

We're proud that Israel is a vibrant, energetic democracy, where people can speak and write freely. The rise of social media has only enhanced global citizenry's abilities to speak their minds and express themselves freely. In any country, Israel included, social media adds a positive impact on shaping political discourse by inviting all to participate.

Q: What is the role of mass communications in the Consulate General of Israel to New York?

Our job, as one of Israel's 103 embassies and consulates throughout the world, is to share the story of Israel with not only the media and local leaders, but with the community at large. We are fortunate to be in such a diverse and exciting metropolitan area here in New York and our goal here is to build bridges and

long-lasting relationships between the State of Israel and Americans of all walks of life.